DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 370 RC 019 387

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TITLE Portraits of Teacher Dedication in Vermont.
PUB DATE Oct 93
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Rural Education Association (85th, Burlington, VT, October 14-17, 1993). Some appendices contain small print.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary School Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; Rural Education; *Rural Schools; Secondary School Teachers; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Characteristics; Teacher Effectiveness; Teacher Morale; *Teacher Motivation; *Teaching Conditions
IDENTIFIERS *Outstanding Teachers; *Vermont

ABSTRACT

Dedication and commitment are useful terms to apply when discussing teacher quality and excellence, especially in rural contexts. A two-stage case study examined archival data on teachers and teaching in Vermont and northern New England and interviewed 12 outstanding rural teachers from low income districts throughout Vermont. The teaching experience of interviewees spanned six decades from the 1930s to the 1980s. Results were used to generate a profile of a committed or dedicated teacher. Such a teacher: (1) might describe teaching in terms of a calling or mission; (2) continues to teach as rewards diminish; (3) exhibits enthusiasm and devotion in the face of adversity; (4) embraces the service mission of teaching; (5) holds detailed abstract concepts about teaching as a profession; (6) can reflect on own teaching; (7) can link personal mission in life to organizational mission; (8) expresses concern for fellow teachers and students; and (9) expends above average amounts of time and energy at work. Teacher time and wealth spent could provide quantifiable measures of teacher commitment and dedication. Outstanding and excellent Vermont teachers of all eras have spent their own money and given great quantities of discretionary time to their students in support of improving education. Contains 65 references. (SV)

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ED 364 370

PORTRAITS OF TEACHER DEDICATION IN VERMONT

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Paper presented at the 1993 Meeting and Research Forum of the National Rural Education Association, Burlington, Vermont, October 13-16, 1993.

RC 019387

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ABSTRACT

The authors of this study have concluded, after an extensive review of the literature and the testimony of numerous Vermont teachers, that dedication and commitment are useful terms to apply when discussing teacher outstandingness and teacher excellence, especially in rural context, and that there are measures which can be quantified of these attributes. It may be that higher levels of teacher dedication or commitment are present in either end of the population spectrum among the very rural and the very urban. It is believed that measures of teacher commitment and dedication could include teacher time and teacher wealth. Outstanding or excellent teachers in Vermont over time have spent their own money and have given great quantities of discretionary time to their students in support of improving education.

The authors of this paper became interested several years ago in teacher motivation, teacher commitment, and teacher dedication. Several literature searches spaced throughout the 80's up into the early 90's showed that, although there was some interest in teacher commitment, no work had been done in the area of teacher dedication, especially as it related to teacher quality, teacher effectiveness, and teacher excellence. In spite of the lack of research, words like commitment and dedication are often used in research on teaching and teacher motivation. The authors concluded that this phenomena was worthy of further investigation and set out to develop a design.

Vermont, which at the time that field research was completed, was the most rural state in the nation. It seemed an excellent place to begin for several reasons. There was a readily identifiable population of teachers who had been labeled by their peers and administrators as excellent or of high quality. These teachers were those who had been selected for recognition by the University of Vermont through its Outstanding Teacher program run annually since 1981. By 1990, almost 800 Vermont teachers had been singled out for this accolade. A search of archival sources led to several diaries and previously unpublished works related to teachers and teaching in Vermont and Northern New England housed at both the Wilbur Collection at the University of Vermont and the Vermont Historical Society Museum in Montpelier. The existence of the second pool of information stimulated the researchers to develop a two-stage case study using the archival data for the first set of cases and eighteen purposefully selected teachers as the second set of cases. Thus, a qualitative design emerged using the two-stage case study mentioned above and incorporating purposive sampling techniques.

Among the descriptors associated with rurality are remoteness, loneliness, scarcity, and lack of opportunity (Matthes and Carlson, 1987).

found that schools experienced great difficulty in securing and training qualified and well-trained teachers if they were located in communities with less than 2500 inhabitants. In a state such as Vermont, the majority of communities contain fewer than that number of residents.

> A climate of commitment and professionalism should not be a matter of theory but of practice obtained by ordinary people through recognition and the importance of creating a supportive environment for the professional growth of teachers. It is a worthy goal of all school systems but a must for the rural system (Matthes and Carlson, 1987, p. 29).

It could be argued that due to a scarcity of resources, including a lower pay scale, rural systems might, in particular, be looking for signs of commitment and dedication in prospective teachers. Sher (1977) and others have found that urban and rural power structures operate differently. Or, put another way, that rural and urban systems operate differently.

During the first half of this century, there were three major studies that influenced the thinking of Vermonters about their educational system and eventually brought about changes. Between 1912 and 1915 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching conducted an investigation of the financing of education in the state of Vermont. Many of their conclusions argued for larger administrative units in order to accomplish economies not thought possible in the small rural schools of the state. As a result of their work there was, for a brief period, a system whereby school superintendents were appointed directly by the State Board of Education and thus were answerable to the state and not to the local communities. This practice was rescinded by legislative action in 1919. It is interesting to note these changes within the context of the present debate on how to govern education in Vermont (Sher, 1977). In 1928, the Vermont Commission on Country Life was formed and a three year study begun by 200 prominent Vermont

citizens, covering a wide range of state problems. What became an early Depression Era initiative was an attempt to adequately describe and suggest ways to maintain the uniqueness of rural country life in the Green Mountain State. This commission also concluded that the consolidation of Vermont's rural districts was necessary. Finally, during the Great Depression, the Vermont State Education Commission begun in 1933 issued a report highlighting the cost savings that could be found in consolidation and in unification. To a state and to communities hard pressed to pay their bills, this message found particularly attentive ears (Sher, 1977).

> Training rural teachers is a serious and complex factor in the state's educational problem. Vermont will always have a large number of one-room rural schools to challenge the best material the normal training courses can attract and turn out. The positions where their services are most needed require unusual resourcefulness, ability and vision, oftentimes under conditions that are difficult and without adequate financial remuneration. How can the best teachers be influenced to see the one-room rural schools in Vermont as a permanent field for the practice of their profession rather than as steppingstones for positions in town and city graded schools? How can the citizens of the state and the towns be convinced that the difficulties and the strategic importance of these rural schools warrant a salary basis more nearly on a level with that of the graded schools and that too much can never be done to dignify and magnify the important place a rural school teacher occupies in Vermont's educational system? (Vermont Education System, 1934, p. 257).

Researchers have found a number of distinctive features of rural communities and social systems operating within them. It has been shown that the people who live in rural areas tend to have unique attitudes, beliefs, and values. Their value of educational attainment is different from their urban counterparts, the way in which their communities are organized to provide them service is different, their housing tends to be different, and the educational preparation and training of teachers shows some differences. It may also be argued that the knowledge and skills as well as the values of rural teachers

differ from urban and suburban counterparts (Coward, 1983).

It was hypothesized that what dedication and commitment looked like might be clearer or easier to observe in teachers working in rural and remote locations. It was felt that this decision was consistent with existing theories describing commitment, including that of cognitive dissonance. Hardship, adversity, and the removal of the reward structure or, as some would say, satisfiers, useful in describing why subjects remain in a position, was felt to be necessary in order to fully explain how commitment or dedication operated. This is not to say that a similar situation could not be constructed for an urban or suburban setting. Indeed, the case can be made for teaching in urban or suburban areas being very difficult and devoid of the rewards which drew people into teaching in the first place. However, for the purposes of this study, rurality was determined to be a necessary part of the context. From another point of view, this made sense in terms of the historical antecedents of the study. Not only Vermont but the nation began as a largely rural and agrarian enterprise. It can be argued that the politics and social systems maintained their agrarian composition far beyond the zenith of the actual social structures which spawned them. Put another way, it wasn't until 1963 that Vermont was able to redistrict its legislature to more nearly represent the principle of one man, one vote. The design of this study required an historical perspective. Teaching was to be viewed across time. Locating that study in an area which remained essentially rural across time made sense. Vermont was such a place. Qualitative methodology has lent itself well to this type of study because it can attend to the time element.

> The dispersal of population creates the major distinction between rural and urban education systems. The dual problem of scale and distance must be conquered to provide quality education in rural areas. Many rural communities find it difficult to offer school programs comparable to those available in suburban school systems. Preschools

> are generally not available. Little adult or vocational education is provided, although the latter is being improved. The structure of public education has been changed dramatically but most changes have been resisted by rural people. To achieve the scale necessary to afford specialized teachers, libraries, gymnasiums, and the other expensive facilities of modern schools, rural communities must band together to form joint school districts or county-wide systems. A policy objective for rural education that has changed political acceptance is that rural children should have educational opportunities relatively equal to those available to urban and suburban children (Rainey and Rainey, 1978, p. 137).

Numerous sources have pointed out time and again the reluctance on the part of rural communities to accept advanced levels of services if it meant giving up control. That drama is being played out today in small Vermont towns just as it was in the 1930's and for decades before that.

The authors postulated that a teacher's life in the nation's most rural state might be tougher and more demanding than in other locations. It was assumed that pay scales would be lower, facilities more antiquated, and that outstanding teachers working under such conditions might help the researchers understand the nature of teacher commitment and dedication. In order to further refine the sample, the researchers selected school districts where the average annual teacher's salary in 1988 was below the state average, where the number of students on free and reduced lunch in that same year was above the state average and where per pupil expenditures for all educational items were also below the state average for those categories. From a reduced pool of 75 to 100 teachers, the researchers further sought geographical distribution and chose teachers who worked all over the state of Vermont. To make the sample more representative, the respondents were chosen so as to reflect Vermont's ratio of men to women in public education and secondary to elementary teachers. This produced the same number of elementary and secondary teachers, but two-thirds of the teachers were women and one-third men.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed and piloted with six teachers. After some modifications, that protocol was used in lengthy tape recorded interviews with twelve other teachers. Word for word transcripts of those interviews were produced. These transcripts were then subjected to several qualitative data management techniques such as constant comparison and generic theorizing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The same techniques were used to handle the field notes taken while reading the archival data. These field notes were treated basically as if they were excerpted from transcripts (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). The data from each set of cases was ordered and reordered to generate themes and categories. Those themes and categories were then cross-compared to see if any similarities developed through time. Data collection, reduction, and sense-making took about a year.

Several interesting points were uncovered during this data treatment process. In the historical literature, there were countless examples of devotion and self-sacrifice. Because of the blending of the role of teacher with church men or missionary on the frontier, there was often a religious overtone to the work of teaching. In addition, themes such as loneliness, poor facilities, unruly students, lack of resources, poor working conditions, etc. emerged. Similar themes were evident in the testimony of today's teachers. Two of the more exciting discoveries which appeared not to be time bound and which the authors felt might be useful as indicators of dedication or commitment were in the area of teacher wealth and teacher time.

It is generally conceded that teacher pay has been low in comparison to other mainline professions. This condition has also been constant across time and has clearly discouraged large numbers of otherwise qualified people from either entering or remaining in the profession. Because of the low pay, the discovery that teachers were using their own money to finance the education of

their students came as a real surprise. There were indications in the historical literature of teachers spending their own wealth on their students but the testimony of today's teachers was particularly powerful. We are reminded of one teacher who, on a salary of less than $25,000 a year, spent over $3,000 of her own wealth in one year for books and materials for her students.

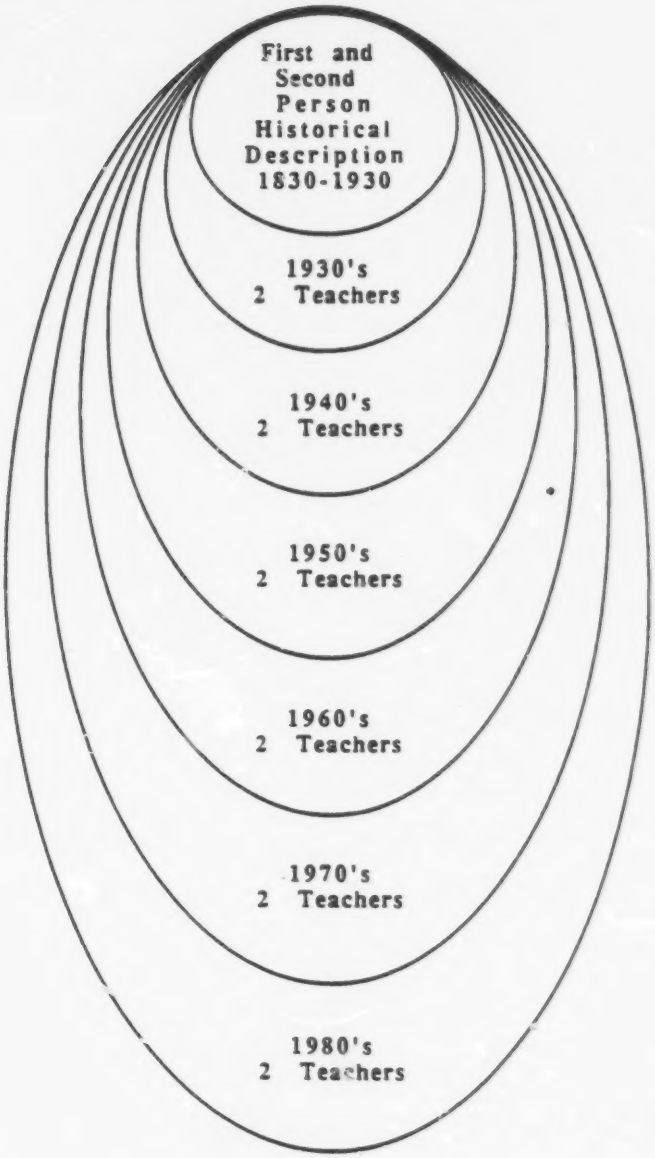
The information regarding teacher time is equally interesting. The twelve teachers whose stories make up the second set of cases were absent from their work, but for very specific purposes. These teachers were rarely sick and rarely took unplanned days. On the other hand, most of them always used the professional days provided for them in their contracts, usually up to three or more a year. In addition, these teachers often reported being in their schools during vacations and on week-ends, both Saturday and Sunday. Their reasons for coming to school had largely to do with increasing their feeling of efficacy while working with their students. In other words, they felt better prepared and more on top of the situation. No attempt was made to quantify the days or hours of extra time spent by these teachers in the schools outside the parameters of the contract day, week, or year, but it is clear that the time spent for all was substantial and that they viewed this as a way of making a contribution of resources that was under their control.

The notion of control leaves us to yet one additional point that may have implications for the future. In the day and age of rhetoric around teacher empowerment, shared decision-making, site-based management, and other aspects of school reform and school structuring, it is interesting to note that teachers consistently report increased satisfaction from a sense of empowerment over decision relating to the teacher/learning process and the welfare of their students with considerably more passion than they do about

securing additional money. This is not to say that teachers are not interested in a fair wage. Indeed, they are, but is is also clear that other things are of equal or more importance once a certain level of income has been reached. Perhaps it would be useful for school administrators to consider ways in which individual teachers or teams of teachers could be directly allocated resources which they were free to realloca.e based on their independent or group assessment of greatest impact. For instance, why not give every classroom teacher each year a check book with an opening balance of several hundred or several thousand dollars, thus empowering them to individually or collectively buy the supplies and materials they needed to teach their class during that year.

In conclusion, it was felt by the authors that notions of dedication and commitment had meaning to outstanding teachers in Vermont, that they were present in the literature across time, that there were quantifiable indicators of their presence, and that they might be fostered or enhanced by the manipulation of variables such as teacher time and teacher wealth.

Excellent Teacher Universe



Explanation

A total of twelve (12) teachers were selected and interviewed. Each had been teaching in the decade he/she was chosen to represent.

Figure 1

Commitment Continuum

LOW	HIGH
1) LITTLE CONCERN FOR STUDENTS	1) HIGH CONCERN FOR STUDENTS AND OTHER TEACHERS
2) LITTLE TIME OR ENERGY EXPENDED	2) EXTRA TIME OR ENERGY EXPENDED
3) PRIMARY CONCERN WITH KEEPING ONE'S JOB	3) PRIMARY CONCERN WITH DOING MORE FOR OTHERS

Figure 2

CONCERN + TIME and ENERGY =
LEVEL OF COMMITMENT

Levels of Abstract Thinking

Low	Moderate	High
• CONFUSED ABOUT PROBLEM	• CAN DEFINE THE PROBLEM	• CAN THINK OF THE PROBLEM FROM MANY PERSPECTIVES
• DON'T KNOW WHAT CAN BE DONE	• CAN THINK OF ONE OR TWO POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO PROBLEM	• CAN GENERATE MANY ALTERNATIVE PLANS
• "SHOW ME"	• HAS TROUBLE THINKING THROUGH A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN	• CAN CHOOSE A PLAN AND THINK THROUGH EACH STEP
• HAS ONE OR TWO HABITUAL, RESPONSES TO PBOBLEMS		

Figure 3

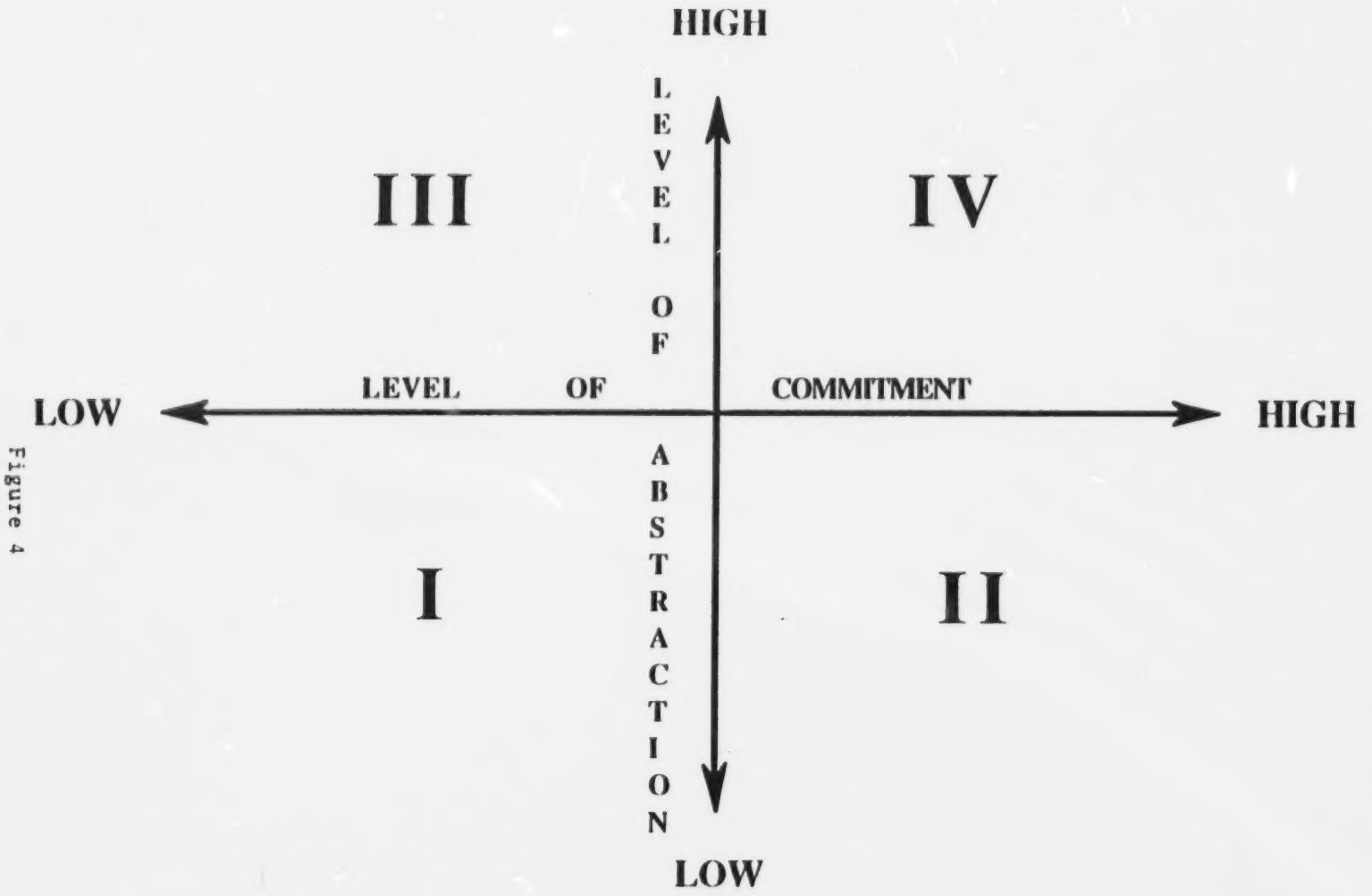
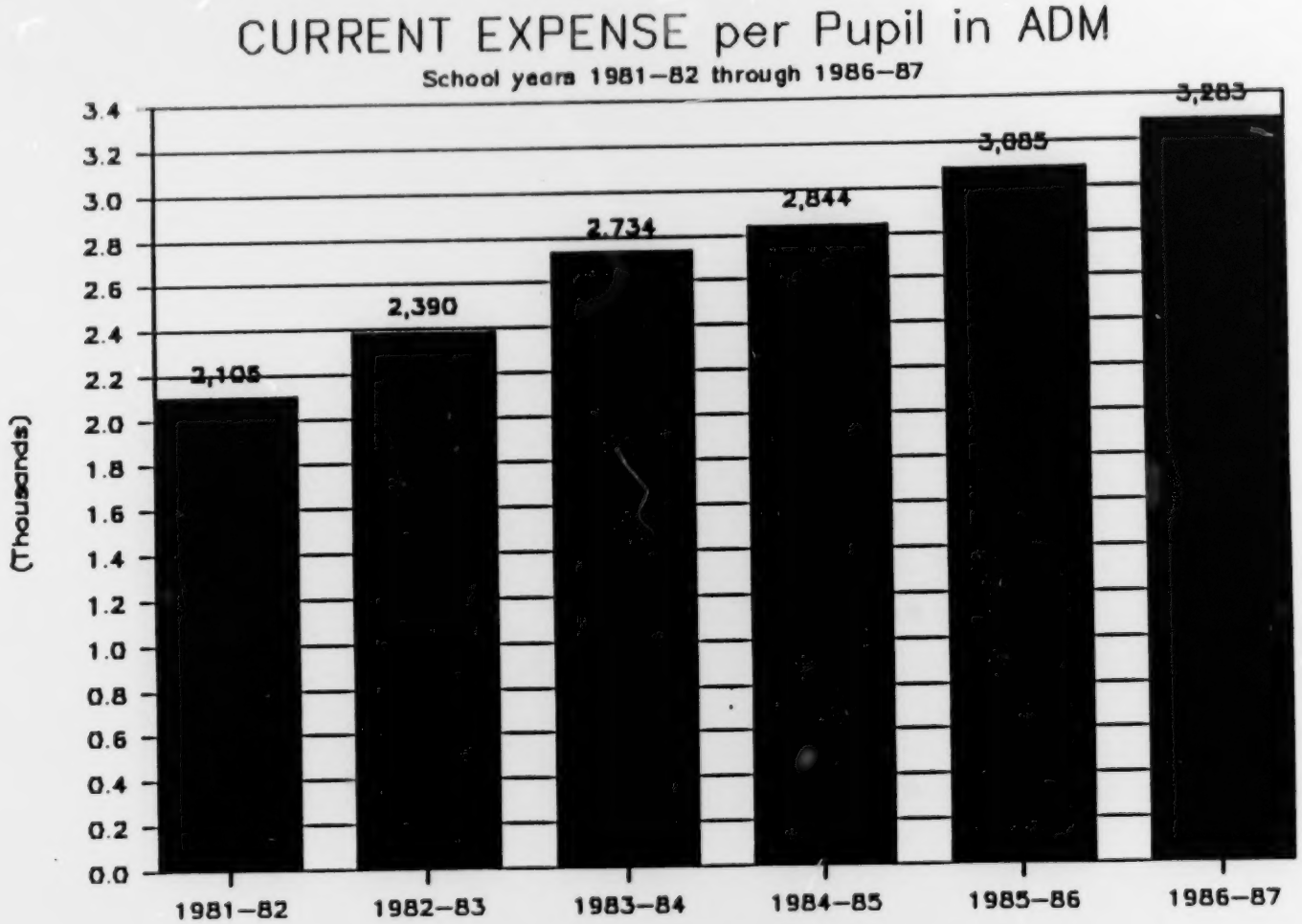

HIGH
LEVEL OF ABSTRACTION
III
IV
LOW
LEVEL OF COMMITMENT
HIGH
I
II
LOW

Figure 4


CURRENT EXPENSE per Pupil in ADM
School years 1981–82 through 1986–87
(Thousands)
3.4
3.2
3.0
2.8
2.6
2.4
2.2
2.0
1.8
1.6
1.4
1.2
1.0
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0.0
2,105
2,390
2,734
2,844
3,085
3,283
1981–82
1982–83
1983–84
1984–85
1985–86
1986–87

OCTOBER, 1988
OCT, FNS-10 REPORT
CAUTION, MACRO ALL-AR25

NAME	SCH NUMBER V)*V)*V))*V)	CNTY	SUP	DIST	OTHER	ENROLL	ADA	# APPROVED FREE	# APPROVED RED	
RATE TABLES AP1..AR32						ENROLL	ADA			
BRISTOL	01 01 031 01	1	1	031	1	414	393	63	21	20%
MT.ABRAHAM UNSD028	01 01 031 90	1	1	031	90	762	705	90	41	
LINCOLN	01 01 112 01	1	1	112	1	93	77	19	8	29
MONKTON	01 01 127 01	1	1	127	1	148	138	14	7	
NEW HAVEN	01 01 138 01	1	1	138	1	132	101	17	3	
STARKSBORO	01 01 196 02	1	1	196	2	167	158	20	12	
ADDISON CENTRAL	01 02 001 01	1	2	001	1	110	103	20	8	
FERRISBURG	01 02 076 01	1	2	076	1	204	200	29	13	
VERGENNES ELEMENTARY	01 02 213 01	1	2	213	1	288	280	43	20	21.8%
VERGENNES UNSD 05	01 02 213 90	1	2	213	90	550	500	50	17	
BRIDPORT	01 03 029 00	1	3	029	00	153	151	57	13	
CORNWALL	01 03 053 01	1	3	053	1	132	114	6	3	
UNSD 03	01 03 123 90	1	3	123	90	950	817	67	19	
WEYBRIDGE	01 03 239 01	1	3	239	1	73	73	8	3	
ORWELL	01 04 148 00	1	4	148	00	164	155	16	13	
LEICESTER	01 36 110 01	1	36	110	1	94	83	29	7	
GRANVILLE	01 50 085 01	1	50	085	1	20	19	4	0	
HANCOCK	01 50 091 01	1	50	091	1	45	39	13	1	31%
KEEWAYDIN	01 90 123 00	1	90	123	00	200	200	0	0	
ARLINGTON	02 05 005 50	2	5	005	50	472	461	29	9	
MT. ANTHONY UNION	02 05 015 90	2	5	015	90	3350	3177	503	141	19.3%
NO. BENNINGTON	02 05 141 01	2	5	141	1	150	138	21	1	
POWNAL ELEM	02 05 159 02	2	5	159	2	290	249	69	32	34.7%
SHAFTSBURY	02 05 183 01	2	5	183	1	355	272	24	5	
MANCHESTER	02 06 119 00	2	6	119	00	510	497	60	14	
READSBORO	02 49 164 00	2	49	164	00	89	89	18	4	
BURKE	03 00 036 01	3	0	036	1	198	192	48	20	
LYNDON CORNER/CAMPUS	03 00 117 01	3	0	117	1	440	436	75	45	
LYNDONVILLE GRADED	03 00 117 00	3	0	117	00	210	175	35	17	
SUTTON	03 00 203 00	3	0	203	00	145	125	31	9	
MILLERS RUN UNSD 037	03 00 240 00	3	0	240	00	125	120	40	13	
DANVILLE NORTH	03 09 057 01	3	9	057	1	62	58	9	4	
DANVILLE VILLAGE	03 09 057 00	3	9	057	00	312	273	25	16	
PEACHAM	03 09 151 03	3	9	151	3	62	47	12	6	
WALDEN	03 09 218 40	3	9	218	40	76	65	26	12	
ST. J. SUMNER	03 11 179 07	3	11	179	7	603	573	170	44	
WATERFORD	03 18 225 00	3	18	225	00	141	120	14	11	
HARDWICK	03 35 092 02	3	35	092	2	299	274	80	32	37%
HAZEN	03 35 092 90	3	35	092	90	396	375	79	24	
BURKE MOUNTAIN	03 90 036 55	3	90	036	55	79	68	0	0	
LYNDON INSTITUTE	03 90 117 60	3	90	117	60	580	580	67	32	
ST. J. ACADEMY	03 90 179 61	3	90	179	61	1027	948	146	32	
COLCHESTER	04 07 050 06	4	7	050	6	2259	1943	152	67	
MILTON	04 10 126 02	4	10	126	2	1873	1672	226	127	18.9
BOLTON (SHILIE)	04 12 022 01	4	12	022	1	32	28	5	0	
HUNTINGTON	04 12 099 01	4	12	099	1	189	187	18	11	
JERICHO	04 12 106 01	4	12	106	1	304	261	12	9	
MT. MANSFIELD UNSD 017	04 12 106 90	4	12	106	90	693	679	16	6	
RICHMOND	04 12 166 01	4	12	166	1	302	299	31	14	

16-Feb-89

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PRELIMINARY REPORT:
1988-89 VERMONT TEACHER SALARIES

131 Districts included in this report.
156 Districts including Supervisory Unions not reporting.

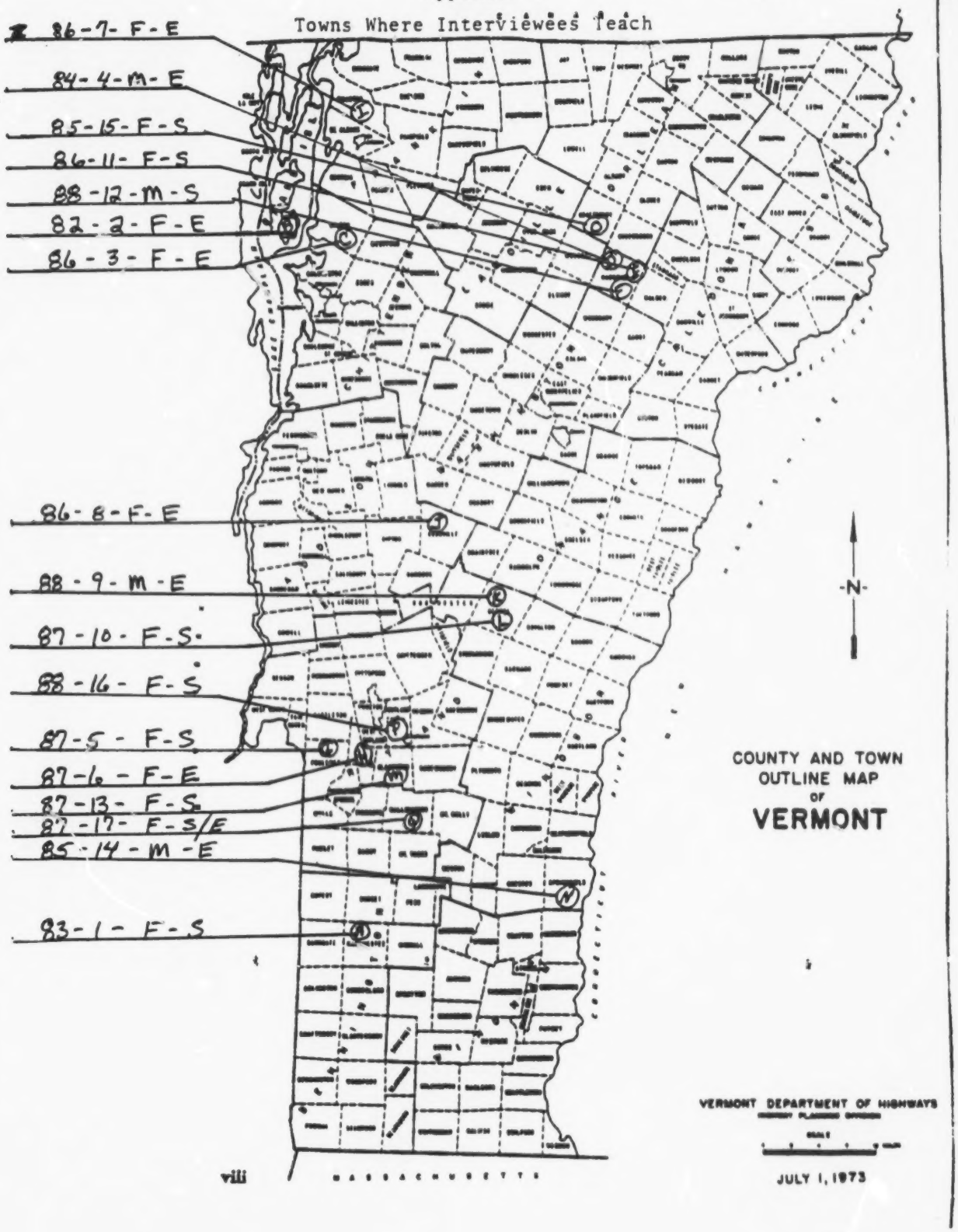
(1) DISTID	(2) District Name	(3) BA LOW SALRY	(4) BA HIGH SALRY	(5) HIGH CREDIT : STEP	(6) MA LOW SALRY	(7) MA HIGH SALRY	(8) HIGH CREDIT : STEP	(9) TOTAL FTE	(10) INDEX	(11) CUMU-LATIVE INDEX	(12) TOTAL SALARIES	(13) AVG SALRY
*********	STATEWIDE TOTALS******	16392	29056		17281	29481		4408	1.798		118215183	26819
	1987-88 Totals (Based on 202 Districts reporting)	14966	26807		16135	27748		6327	1.854		155052741	24507

Appendix H

Column Definitions:

(1) DISTID is the district ID number (SU DIST TYPE).
(2) District Name.
(3) BA LOW SALRY is the low salary in the first BA column, also used as the base salary.
(4) BA HIGH SALRY is the high salary in the last BA column.
(5) BA HIGH CREDIT:STEP is the number of credits and step level necessary to reach highest BA salary.
(6) MA LOW SALRY is the low salary in the first MA column. If it is 0, then the schedule doesn't have an MA column.
(7) MA HIGH SALRY is the high salary in the last MA column, also used as the maximum salary.
(8) MA HIGH CREDIT:STEP is the number of credits and step level necessary to reach highest MA salary.
(9) TOTAL FTE is the district total full-time equivalent teachers reported on the survey form.
(10) INDEX is column (7) divided by column (3).
(11) CUMULATIVE INDEX is the sum of all FTE's times their respective index levels.
(12) TOTAL SALARIES is the sum of all FTE's times their respective salary levels.
(13) AVG SALRY is column (12) divided by column (9).

Towns Where Interviewees Teach



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Dedication/Commitment Profile

Through a review of written descriptions of teachers and teaching, written or oral testimony, interviews, video tapes and other sources, it appears a committed or dedicated teacher:

1. might describe teaching in terms of a calling or mission (Teacher Talks, 1986)
2. would continue to teach as rewards diminish (At Risk, 1983)
3. would exhibit enthusiasm, devotion, service in the face of adversity, caring (Webster)
4. embraces the service mission of teaching (Cuban, 1984)
5. holds detailed, abstract concepts about teaching as a profession (Glickman, 1985)
6. can watch themselves as they teach or create a metacognition of teaching (Glickman, 1985)
7. can link their personal mission in life to that of the organization to which they belong (Kuhn & Griese, 1984).
8. expresses concern for fellow teachers and students (Glickman, 1985)
9. expends above average amounts of time and energy in their work (Glickman, 1985)

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